

Night Stalkers and Mean Streets

Urban Guerrillas in Afghanistan

Ali Ahmad Jalali
Lester W. Grau

Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) forces were never able to completely control the major cities of Kandahar and Herat. Finally, the Soviets bombed 75 percent of Herat and virtually the entire Kandahar suburb into rubble but still failed to stop the urban guerrillas. The DRA and the Soviets had more success in controlling the capital city of Kabul, but still could not stop the rocket attacks and guerrilla actions.

Surviving urban guerrillas are harder to find to interview than guerrillas who fight in the countryside. Urban guerrillas are surrounded by potential informants and government spies. They must frequently move around unarmed, and the government can usually react to their actions much faster than would be possible in the countryside. To survive, the urban guerrilla must be anonymous and ruthless. For this reason, urban guerrilla groups in Afghanistan were usually small and fought back with actions of short duration. Many urban guerrillas lived in the countryside or the suburbs and entered the cities only for combat. The Soviets and the DRA

This article is taken from the authors' book The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics In the Soviet Afghan War (United States Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division, 1999), which is based upon interviews with members of the Mujahideen resistance and presented in vignettes in the words of the guerrillas.

These vignettes, from the chapter on urban combat, provide insights into the ingenuity, determination, and flexibility of the Afghan guerrillas, traits that are likely to characterize other groups, including our potential adversaries.

devoted a great deal of effort to finding and eliminating them, and many innocent civilians became victims of this hunt. We are grateful to the urban guerrillas who provided us with these candid interviews:

Kidnapping a Soviet Adviser

By Commander Shahabuddin

We were in contact with an Afghan driver from Paktia Province who drove for a civilian Soviet adviser. The adviser worked with the DRA mining industry. We wanted to kidnap the adviser. The driver had trained for a short time in the USSR and so the adviser trusted him. The driver agreed to help us, but we did not trust him and asked him to prove his loyalty. He stated, "I will bring my family to stay in a Mujahideen-controlled area as proof of my trustworthiness." The driver came to our camp with his wife and family. I sent his family to my village of Shewaki to stay while we captured the adviser.

One day the driver informed us that the adviser's wife was coming from the Soviet Union to join him. The driver would take the adviser to the airport to meet his wife. We gave the driver a small hand-held radio and told him to contact us if there were any changes. We would contact him within 20 minutes of his call. The driver called us one morning. He reported that the adviser's wife was arriving that day and that no one would accompany the adviser but the driver. We

dressed one of our Mujahideen in a DRA military officer's uniform and put him in a car and sent him to wait at the bridge over the Kabul River in East Kabul. He got out of the car and waited for the Soviet adviser's car, which soon arrived. The driver pointed at our Mujahideen and told the adviser, "That's my brother. He's going to the airport. Can we give him a ride?" The adviser agreed and they stopped to pick up "the officer," who got into the back seat behind the adviser and pulled out a pistol. He held the pistol to the adviser's back and ordered the driver to drive to Shewaki. Another car, carrying eight of our Mujahideen armed with pistols with silencers, followed the adviser's car. We had no trouble with the checkpoints since the guards saw the DRA officer's uniform, saluted, and waved the car and its "security tail" right through.

We took the adviser to Shewaki and burned his car. The government launched a major search effort, so we moved the adviser again, to the Abdara Valley. Government helicopters strafed Shewaki after we left and landed search detachments, trying to find the adviser. We kept the adviser in the Abdara Valley for two days, then moved him to Tezin, near Jalalabad, for a few more days. Finally, we took him across the border to Peshawar, Pakistan, where we turned him over to one of the factions. I do not know what happened to him.

Four Urban Bomb Attacks

By Haji Mohammad Yakub

Bombing is a necessary part of being an urban guerrilla. The object is to create fear and take out selected individuals. We got our explosives from Pakistan. Commander Azizuddin and Commander Meskimyar were our contacts in Paghman District who forwarded the explosives and detonators to us. They used elderly people as our go-betweens to carry messages and explosives to us. The following are typical of the missions carried out against the Soviets and their allies.

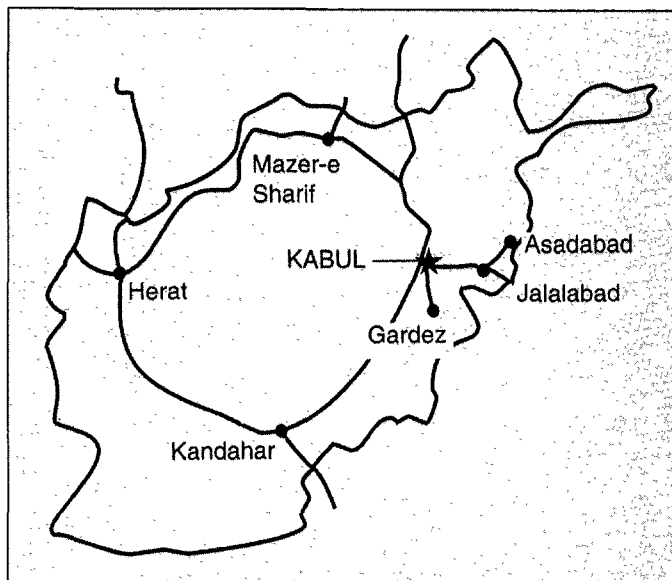
- *In April 1980, we carried out an attack on the Radio Afghanistan building, which housed the central offices for Afghanistan radio and television broadcasting. Soviet advisers worked at the building where they oversaw radio and television broadcasting and edited and cleared the news before broadcast. The Soviets were our targets. We received a bomb from our contacts and gave it to a woman who worked in the radio station. She smuggled it in to the station and armed it. The bomb went off at 1000 hours on a workday. The explosion killed two Afghan Party activists and two Soviets. It also wounded a DRA soldier. For some time after the blast, Afghanistan Radio and TV stopped broadcasting. After this, the security procedures for the building were greatly increased and everyone was carefully searched. Our lady contact later managed to get herself transferred to the payroll office of Kabul University.*

- *The communist regime converted Kabul University into a center for communist indoctrination. We decided to target the primary Party Organization at Kabul University in January 1981. Bombing seemed to be our best option. By this time, our lady contact from Radio Afghanistan was working in the payroll office at the University. We gave her*

two bombs. She planted one in the University Administration building and set the timer for 1000. She put the second in the primary Party Organization building and set that timer for 1145. The theory was that, after the first bomb went off, people would mill around the site and then the key party activists would gather in the primary Party Organization building to discuss the bombing. The second bomb would attack this concentration. Our plan worked as we thought it would. Following the blast in the administration building, the party secretaries of all the various communist organizations gathered in the primary Party Organization building. The blast killed a Soviet adviser and several party secretaries. The bombs killed a total of ten and wounded an unknown number.

- *On 6 May 1983 we bombed the Ministry of Interior building in Kabul. We had planted 27 kilograms of explosive in a room on the second floor close to the office of the minister. The bombs were hidden in four large flower pots that had been there for some time. We had a contact who was a gardener for the Ministry of the Interior. He agreed to smuggle in the explosives, plant the bombs, and set them for detonation. We trained him how to do the job. He mixed the explosives with limestone and smuggled them in plastic bags over a period of time. We planned to detonate the bombs during the daytime for maximum casualties, but our faction headquarters in Peshawar overruled us and told us to set the bombs off at night. Our faction wanted to keep Minister of the Interior Gulab Zoy alive since he was a leading member of the Khalq faction and his survival would insure that the friction between the Khalq and Parchim communist party factions continued.*

When he went home at 1600, the gardener set all the time pencils for 2300. There was no sense setting different times since the building would virtually be deserted. The bombs went off on time and killed four duty officers and damaged the minister's office. If we had set off the bombs during the day, we would have killed Gulab Zoy, Ghzi (his body guard), Sheruddin (his aide-de-camp), and perhaps a hundred oth-



Map 1. Afghanistan

ers. The DRA closed the roads leading to the site for 24 hours and conducted an investigation. However, they thought that the blast was connected to some internal quarrel within the communist leadership and never suspected our gardener.

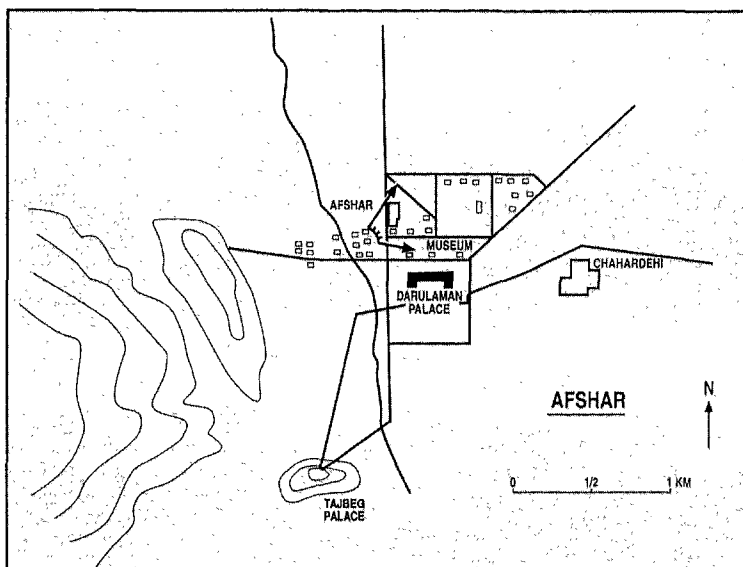
- The Soviets lived in the eastern Micro rayon region of Kabul. We decided to attack them right where they were living. There was a bus stop in the area where the Soviets would wait for buses to take them to work. We checked the timing of the buses. There was a daily 0745 bus that drew the most Soviets. We needed to establish a pattern so that we could leave a bomb without drawing attention. We got a pushcart and loaded it with the best fruits and vegetables we could get. The produce came from Parwan Province. We charged reasonable prices. The Soviets and local people got used to seeing us there and buying from us. We kept this up for several days. At night, we would work on the pushcart. We built a false bottom in the cart for our bombs, where they would be undetected even if the cart was inspected. We attacked on 2 October 1983. We loaded five bombs into the false bottom, inserted time pencil fuses in the bombs, and set them for 0743. Then we put in the false bottom and loaded the cart with produce. Six Mujahideen carried out the attack. None of us carried weapons. We brought the cart to the bus stop as usual. Thirteen Soviets crowded round it to see what was on sale. We slipped away from the cart and mixed with the local people. The bombs went off at 0743 just before the bus arrived. The blast killed 13, wounded 12, and damaged a nearby store. The DRA searched the crowd but made no arrests from our group.

Many people find such bombing attacks morally reprehensible, yet have no qualms about much larger bombs dropped from aircraft. Neither type of bombing attack is surgical, and both types kill innocent bystanders. The only real difference is in the size of the bomb and the means of delivery. The Mujahideen lacked an air force but retained a limited bombing option. The Soviets had an air force and conducted large-scale bombing attacks throughout the war.

Incident at Qala-e Jabar

By Mohammad Humayun Shahin³

During Ramadan (June) of 1981, five Mujahideen met with a Soviet soldier in Qala-e Jabar to buy some Kalashnikov magazines from him. Qala-e Jabar is some three kilometers south of the Darulaman Soviet military base. Our group leader was Alozai, who was known as Sher Khan. Hukum Khan, two others, and I made up the group. We went to Qala-e Jabar and met with the Soviet soldier. He said his name was Hasan and showed us his merchandise. We agreed to buy the magazines and pulled out a wad of 50-Afghani notes. The Soviet soldier was not familiar with the 50-Afghani note and demanded that we pay in 100s. Since we could not speak Russian, Sher Khan tried to show him that two 50-Afghani notes equaled one 100-Afghani note. He even wrote it on a scrap of paper. The Soviet,



Map 2. Afshar Ambush

however, apparently did not understand and kept demanding 100-Afghani notes, which we did not have.

As we tried to communicate, the Soviet got louder and louder. We were fairly close to the Soviet camp and were beginning to worry that this might be a trap and that he was signaling others. Hukum Khan grabbed the Soviet in a headlock and wrestled him to the ground while Commander Sher Khan took out his knife and stabbed the Soviet to death. Then we grabbed the rifle magazines, plus the Soviet's AK-74 assault rifle and left the area.

There was a regular commerce between the Soviet soldiers and the Afghan populace. Soviet conscripts would sell fuel, ammunition, weapons, batteries, and military equipment for hashish, food, and Afghan money. They would use the money in the bazaars of Kabul to buy western stereos, music tapes, cigarettes, and clothing. Some goods were available in the Soviet PX (voyentorg), but the conscript soldiers had little access or cash, so they tried to shop locally for items they wanted.

Afshar Ambush

By Commander Asil Khan

On 28 May 1982 I led a group of four Mujahideen in an ambush at the very gates of the Soviet garrison in Kabul. At that time, elements of the Soviet 103d Airborne Division and some other units were based in Darulaman about 10 kilometers southwest of downtown Kabul. The headquarters of the Soviet 40th Army was there in the Tajbeg Palace.

I selected the ambush site after we spent several days in reconnaissance and surveillance of the Soviet traffic around Darulaman. During the reconnaissance, we detected a pattern in Soviet vehicular movement along the road from Kabul to the Soviet headquarters in the Tajbeg Palace. Just north of the Soviet Darulaman base is the small village of Afshar. It has a typical suburban bazaar with several grocery and fresh fruit stores and stalls. Soviet soldiers frequented this bazaar and would stop their vehicles there to

buy cigarettes, food, and imported vodka. Afshar looked like a good ambush site. Soviet soldiers felt secure there, there was enough room to set up an ambush, and site entrance and exit were fairly easy. The path to and from the ambush was mostly concealed, and we could easily reach Mujahideen bases and safe houses in the Chardehi District using this path.

We spent the day of the ambush in Qala-3 Bakhtiar—a village six kilometers to the west of the ambush site. We had four AK-47s and a non-Soviet manufactured light antitank grenade launcher. In the early evening, we moved out toward Afshar. It was the Muslim month of Ramadan when Muslims fast during the entire day. Few people were out at sunset since this is the time to break the daily fast. Since our ambush site was in the immediate vicinity of the Soviet base, I decided to conduct a very quick attack on a single Soviet vehicle and to take prisoners if possible.

We moved through a narrow street of Afshar that opened onto the main road north of the Darulaman Palace. Around 1930 hours, as my leading riflemen reached the street intersection, a Soviet GAZ-66 truck approached from the east on its way to the military camp. The truck had five passengers—a driver, a soldier in the right front seat, and three soldiers in the back. One of the soldiers had a back-packed radio. I told my antitank gunner to fire when the vehicle was in the kill zone. He fired but narrowly missed the truck. The truck came to a sudden halt, and its occupants jumped out of the vehicle, took up positions, and started firing at random.

During the brief fire fight, we killed one Soviet soldier. Two soldiers ran away to the southwest toward their camp. One soldier crawled under the truck near the rear tires. The radio-man rushed into an open grocery store and hid there. One of my Mujahideen was close to the shop behind a concrete electric pylon. I told him to follow the Soviet radio-man into the front of the shop while I went in the shop's back door and introduced myself as a "friend." The Soviet soldier was flustered at first, but when he saw the foreign light antitank weapon in the hands of my Mujahideen, he uttered "dushman" [enemy]. He kept quiet as we bound his hands and led him out back. I recalled my team and we quickly left the area. The whole action lasted only a few minutes.

Fearing enemy retaliation, we moved out swiftly in the dark, heading to Qala-e Bakhtiar. From there, we went on to Qalal-e Bahadur Khan, Kala-e Jabar Khan, and Kala-e Qazi until we reached our Front's base at Morghgiran around 2200 hours. We kept our prisoner there for three days and then transferred him to our faction headquarters in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Detailed reconnaissance and knowledge of the enemy's movement and security arrangements contributed to a workable ambush right in the heart of the Soviet garrison area. The Soviets had not posted a vulnerable point adjacent to their garrison—either through overconfidence, or due to negligence on the part of lower-level commanders.

The selection of a small group of fighters, with an effective mix of weapons and good selection of the ambush site, played a significant role in the action. But using a non-

standard antitank weapon probably caused the gunner to miss a large target at close range. One wonders if the gunner had any training or practice with the weapon before he used it. An RPG-7 and an experienced gunner were needed.

One also wonders why the Soviets stopped their truck in the middle of a kill zone once the Mujahideen rocket missed them. There was no need for the truck to stop, and the soldiers could have escaped through the small-arms fire before the antitank gunner had a chance to reload. The Soviets failed to react effectively. Stopping in a kill zone under small-arms fire was a risky and unwise move that cost the Soviets the life of one soldier and the capture of another.

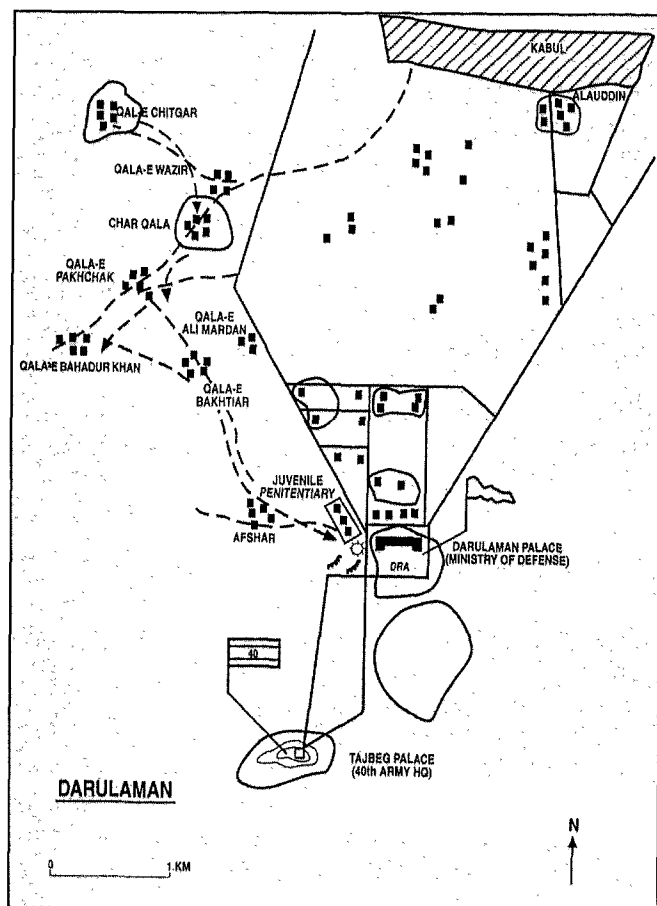
Attack on the Ministry of Defense

By Mohammad Humayun Shahin

In November 1982 some 60 Mujahideen from Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin and Mohseni's Harakat-e Islami launched a night attack on the DRA Ministry of Defense located in the Darulaman Palace. The security in the area was very tight and the area between Darulaman Palace and the Tajbeg Palace (Headquarters of the Soviet 40th Army) was heavily patrolled. We decided to limit the attack to a short-range RPG attack. The Hezb group were armed with AK-47 Kalashnikovs, while the Mohseni group had British Sten guns [a 9mm World War II submachinegun with a 32-round magazine that fires some 540 rounds per minute] and other weapons. The Mohseni used the RPG-7 in the attack. Both sides provided RPG ammunition.

We assembled in the staging area at Char Qala in late afternoon. Char Qala is about three kilometers north of the target. From there, we moved south in groups to the intermediate villages of Qala-e Pakhchak and Qala-e Bahadur Khan and Qala-e Bakhtiar. Our attack position was a water mill outside the Juvenile Penitentiary close to the Darulaman Palace. As we moved, we dropped off security elements. Most of the men in the group were assigned to provide security during movement to and from the target area. Security elements were positioned at key locations, which facilitated our infiltration and withdrawal. Once our forward security elements secured the firing area, the RPG-7 gunner Saadat (from the Mohseni faction) took his position about 250 meters from the target. He fired two rockets at the building. The enemy response was immediate. Guards from around the palace filled the night with heavy small-arms fire. We did not return their fire. Instead, we immediately began retracing our steps and pulled out along the route held by our security detail. We then scattered into hiding places and safe houses in the villages of Chardehi. Some years later, a prison inmate who was on the RPG side during the night attack told a Mujahideen contact that about 20 people were killed or injured in our attack.

The Mujahideen urban warfare tactics were low-level and fairly unsophisticated. Their actions were usually limited to a single strike followed by an immediate withdrawal to avoid decisive engagement with a better-armed and supported regular force. Survival dictated the tactics, but their impact



Map 3. Attack on the Ministry of Defense

was political and psychological rather than military. The work and risk that the urban guerrillas accepted was great, and the results were often minimal or not immediately evident.

Mujahideen success in the urban areas was due primarily to the support of the population and the lack of DRA/Soviet control outside the areas they physically controlled. The cities were under nighttime curfew, but the patrols enforcing the curfew could hardly move safely off the main city roads. The Mujahideen had great freedom of action outside the main thoroughfares and in the suburbs. But they could not fully exploit this advantage due to insufficient training, poor organizational structure, a lack of modern weapons and equipment, an ineffective command and control system, and a lack of tactical cohesiveness among the various Mujahideen combatant groups. The lack of communications equipment, particularly in the early days of the war, severely hampered the Mujahideen.

Raid on Balahessar Fortress

By Commander Shahabuddin

A Soviet regiment was garrisoned in the Balahessar Fortress in Kabul. In September or October 1983, we decided to raid a security outpost south of Balahessar. This outpost formed part of the security belt around the fortress. I had 62 Mujahideen in my group. My armaments included eight RPG-7s and two 82mm recoilless rifles. My base was some ten kilometers south of Kabul at Yakhdara. We planned the

raid in our base at Yakhdara, moved in the late afternoon to the village of Shewak, and waited until dark to move out. On the way, there were several regime outposts. I detailed a five-man security element against each one as we passed it. The main outpost was at Aakhozi and others were at Bagh-e Afzal and Qalacha. The security element's mission was to secure our return trip so we wouldn't be ambushed by the enemy.

We reached Balahessar fortress, which is surrounded by several security posts. I retained a 15-man attack group and posted the rest of my command as security elements guarding the other outposts. I divided my attack group into a five-man support group and a ten-man assault group. We crept up to the outpost, climbed the wall, got up on the roof of the outpost, and then attacked it. I led the assault group. We hit the sentry with an RPG and he vaporized. We blew open the doors with RPG rockets and opened fire on the soldiers in the courtyard. We killed 12 of the DRA and captured three of their wounded. The rest escaped through a secret covered passage into Balahessar fortress. I had two KIA. One was Zabat Halim. [a legendary urban guerrilla who had been an NCO in the Royal Afghan Army, and whose death was a blow to the Mujahideen]. We took our dead with us. We could not carry the wounded prisoners so we left them there. We captured 16 weapons—Kalashnikovs and machineguns, a mortar, and an RPG. As we left, there was a commotion in Balahessar, and tanks moved out of the fortress in our direction. One tank came close to us, and we destroyed it with an RPG. The other tanks then stopped coming—they had lost their taste for the fight. We just wanted to get out of there, so we left for our assembly area. We had a designated assembly area and, as we approached it we were challenged and responded with the password. Once I assembled my entire group, we left. My security elements guaranteed a safe return. This raid was on the tenth day of the first month of the Islamic Lunar calendar—the Day of Ashura. This day commemorates the anniversary of the massacre of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson Hussein and his 72 followers at Karbala in Iraq. It is a day of mourning, reflection, and solemn thinking for Shia and others. On this day, we thought of our dead who died defending truth and righteousness.

Many of the urban guerrilla commanders maintained their main operating bases in the suburbs or outlying villages, where it was easier to assemble and train groups of men without government observation. The guerrilla commanders maintained a net of informers and supporters who aided their entry into and passage through the urban area. Still, guerrilla groups operating within an urban area had to secure their route of entry and withdrawal, which took the bulk of their force.

Raid on the Kabul Metropolitan Bus Transportation Authority

By Commander Shabuddin

In October 1983 I assembled 120 Mujahideen at our base

at Yakhdara for a series of raids. We had 16 RPG-7s, three mortars, three 82mm recoilless rifles, and numerous small arms. I divided the force into three 20-man teams to attack the Bagrami textile company, the police station, and—our main objective—the Kabul Metropolitan Bus Transportation Authority, located on the east side of the city, which served as the central bus terminal for 130 buses. Sixty men constituted the security element, which would secure our route of advance and withdrawal. A primary consideration of the urban guerrilla is always covering his route of retreat. We moved our force from our base and spread out into the surrounding villages. To preserve mission security, only my subcommanders and I knew the plan. Once we were in position, the commanders would brief their men and tell them what to do. The first group went to the textile mill. The second group—reinforced with an 82mm recoilless rifle, a mortar, and some RPG-7s—set out to attack the police station at Kart-e Naw. I commanded the main attack against the bus authority. As we moved, we posted security elements outside all the security outposts in the area. I sent one group of Mujahideen to the Eqlal cinema to attack the security outpost located there so that these soldiers would not interfere with our raid. As our Mujahideen were getting ready to attack the outpost, a roving jeep patrol came by. They destroyed the jeep with a rocket. The soldiers in the security outpost saw the burning jeep and ran away. The Mujahideen captured three Kalashnikovs at this site.

I led my group to the large enclosure of the bus transportation authority. When we got there, I posted a few guards to prevent anyone from surprising us. Then we attacked the security detachment at the bus park. We killed eight, captured two, and torched 127 buses in the enclosure. Only three buses escaped destruction. We also captured 13 or 14 Kalashnikovs and 155 bayonets. We withdrew over our escape route to our base camp. I learned that the group attacking against the textile mill fired their mortar and heavy weapons and inflicted damage on the building. Kabul was without bus transportation for a good while.

The urban guerrilla attacks the credibility of the government by chipping away at morale, attacking notable government targets, and disrupting the daily life of the populace. The bus terminal was an optimum target since it clearly demonstrated the reach of the Mujahideen and considerably slowed the life of the capital city.

Night Raid on a City Outpost

By Ghulam Farouq

I was a high school student in Kandahar and used my student identification to move freely around the city to support the Mujahideen. I would try to make contacts with DRA soldiers in the government outposts during the day, and then the Mujahideen would use the soldiers' information to attack them at night. One day in January 1984, I made contact with a soldier who showed a willingness to cooperate with the Mujahideen in capturing his outpost. This was the Saray-e Saat-ha security outpost in Kandahar. The post was

located on the second floor of a building in the Bazaar-e Shah section of the city, across from the road junction of Alizai Street and Bazaar-e Shah. The outpost was located there because the Mujahideen used Alizai Street to enter the city and the outpost controlled this path.

I took the soldier with me on my bicycle to Chardewal—some six kilometers south of the city. There, we met with my commander, Ali Yawar. We all discussed our plan; then I brought the soldier back to the city on my bicycle. That night, our group of 30 Mujahideen assembled. We entered the city on the south side near the Shekarpur gate (Rangrezha street). From there, we moved along Sherali Khan street near Bazaar-e Herat and from there to Wali Mohammad street. As we moved along this path, we posted security so we could withdraw safely. We had agreed with my contact that we would arrive at 2200 hours. We arrived on time and signaled with a flashlight as we approached the outpost. Our contact answered our signal. We crossed the paved road and posted our men at the gate. There were 22 Mujahideen now securing the route and gate. The remaining eight of us entered the gate and climbed to the second floor. Everyone appeared to be asleep. There was one soldier who had just completed his turn as sentry and we assumed he was asleep. He wasn't. He grabbed his Kalashnikov and fired at us, killing one. The dead Mujahideen's brother returned fire, killing the soldier and two of his sleeping comrades. We captured four other DRA soldiers plus nine Kalashnikovs and a pistol. My contact deserted to us.

The firing alerted DRA forces, and it would be hard to leave the city carrying a body, so we started to take the body to a safe house where we could leave it for the night. As we were moving down the street, one of our four captives escaped. A Mujahideen tried to fire at him but discovered he was out of ammunition. We knew that the escaped DRA soldier would report our whereabouts to the authorities and, since he escaped near the safe house, we could not now risk leaving the body there. So we left the body hidden near a bakery. We covered the blood trail with dirt and then withdrew along the same route we entered. We left the city at 0200 hours.

Since the government knew that we had left our dead behind, they blocked all entrances into the city. We tried to return for our dead the next night but could not get in. On the third night, we tried a different route from the north of town through the Chawnay suburbs. We traveled from Kal-scha-e Mirza to Chawnay. We got into the city and went to the bakery. The government had not found the body, so we retrieved it and took it outside of town for a decent burial. The person who was killed was Hafizulla—a graduate of Kabul University.

Movement through a city is high risk unless the route is secured. In this case, more than two thirds of the available force secured the route. This got the force out safely. On the other hand, prisoner security was not very good. Prisoners should be bound, gagged, and roped together in small groups for firm control. If possible, they should be blindfolded so that they remain disoriented and unable to give much imme-

diate information should they escape. Finally, a raiding force should be kept small, but the correlation of Mujahideen to DRA was almost one to one. Surprise gave the Mujahideen an advantage, but the one soldier who was not sleeping offset that advantage.

Raid on 15 Division Garrison

By Commander Akhtarjhan

The DRA 15th Infantry Division was garrisoned in Kandahar, and we had contacts within the division. In the fall of 1987, our contacts invited us to come and seize the weapons from the division's military police company. We gathered about 100 Mujahideen for the operation. I commanded a group of 15 within the larger group. We crossed the Argandab River from our base camp at Chaharqulba to Baba Walisaheb and, from there, we went through the suburb of Chawnay. Local guerrillas secured our passage. We finally reached the division's main garrison. We waited until the moon set around midnight. The military police company building was at the end of the main compound. We crept to the building and saw that our contacts had placed a ladder against the wall for us. Some of our group took up positions outside the compound while our raiding group of 50 climbed the ladder up onto the roof of the building. Then we climbed down from the roof inside the compound walls.

Some of our contacts were on sentry duty, so we had no troubles. Our contacts met us and led us into the barracks building. We assembled in a large empty room. Our contacts then took us to different rooms where the soldiers were sleeping—five or six per room—and took their weapons. Then we raided the larger arms room next to the barracks and took hundreds of weapons. We then started carrying all the weapons onto the roof and passing them down to our fellows outside the compound. While we were doing this, the company political officer got out of bed and saw us. He started to make a noise, so we killed him with some of the bayonets. We finished getting the weapons out and left for our base camp. Our contacts deserted the DRA and came with us. [Commander Akhtarjhan was an elementary school student when he joined the Jihad, or holy war, at the age of 12. Because he had two brothers killed in the Jihad, he took their place as family tradition dictated. At the end of the war, he was 25 and a commander.]

The Mujahideen penetration of the DRA was essential for successful raids like this. Entering a sleeping compound is always a high-risk proposition, because someone besides the sentries is always awake, or suddenly awakens. A secure approach and withdrawal route is essential to urban guerril-

las. Having local guerrillas secure the route allowed the force to bring enough people to carry off the captured weapons without worrying about being ambushed on the way out.

The urban guerrillas' biggest concerns were security and logistics. Security demanded small groups and a supporting net of agents and informants throughout the community. Logistic support often came from their enemy through the purchase or capture of needed supplies. The urban guerrillas in Afghanistan were never strong enough to capture a city, but their constant raids and ambushes created a siege mentality among the inhabitants and diverted large numbers of soldiers from the main battle for control of the countryside.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have learned a lot from the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, but above all it underlines the challenges of dealing with a tough, determined enemy on his own turf. As this series of actions illustrates, the Mujahideen were able to move freely among the population and strike at the place and time of their choosing. Neither the massive retaliatory strikes of Soviet ground and air forces nor their efforts to separate the guerrilla from his support base were successful.

The concept of selectively targeting public facilities for bombing as described—with its acceptance of collateral casualties and damage—may strike us as reprehensible. But these and other tactics recounted here are the methods of choice for many nationalist and terrorist organizations active in the world today, and we can learn a great deal by studying the way they habitually operate. Just as in Afghanistan, hostile groups are not likely to risk direct confrontation with large conventional police and military forces, preferring instead a more subtle mode of operation.

As we prepare to deal with the contingencies of the next century, we would do well to closely examine our goals and our potential allies and adversaries before committing ourselves to any course of action.

Ali Ahmad Jalali is a former Afghan Army Colonel. A distinguished graduate of the Military University of Kabul, he has also attended the U.S. Army's Infantry Officers Advanced Course and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. He joined the Mujahideen in 1980 and served as the top military planner on the directing staff of the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen during before he joined the Voice of America. As a journalist, he has covered Central Asia and Afghanistan over the past 15 years.

Lester W. Grau retired from the Army as an Infantry colonel and foreign area officer specializing in the former Soviet Union. He is now assigned to the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His earlier book, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*, a companion piece to *The Other Side of the Mountain*, deals with Soviet tactics in Afghanistan.

